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ABSTRACT

The report presents a summary of problems, issues, and recommendations regarding the interagency cooperation of special education, occupational education, and vocational rehabilitation in New York State. The report is the result of seven conferences attended by state, regional, and local agency personnel which focused on five topic areas: communication/information, attitudes, policies/procedures, resources (human and other), and programs (K-adult). Synopses of problems and issues are listed, along with summaries of recommendations for each topic. Among general findings of the conferences were that there are currently no stated common purposes, policies, or procedures to foster cooperative/collaborative relationships; there are no clear role or responsibility delineations; there is no reliable system for managing the transmission, storage, and retrieval of information required; and there is no formalized continuum encompassing career education, prevocational, occupational education, and vocational rehabilitation for handicapped persons. (CL)

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SERVICES FOR THE HANDICAPPED - LINKING SPECIAL EDUCATION, OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The University of The State of New York
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Albany, New York 12234
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INTRODUCTION

In 1978 the Board of Regents established the educational goal of developing in children those occupational competencies necessary to secure employment commensurate with their abilities and aspirations and to perform work in a manner that is gratifying to the individual. Children with handicapping conditions are not to be excluded from opportunities for this major learning achievement. These are children who may require special education assistance and a modified vocational education program. Attainment of this goal for these children also requires guidance information about the labor market and the provision of counseling and rehabilitation services which help insure initial and continuing employment.

When programs designed to realize this goal are implemented, the Department's offices for Education of Children with Handicapping Conditions, Occupational and Continuing Education and Vocational Rehabilitation are responsible for providing leadership, technical assistance and evaluating program effectiveness. To overcome the constraints imposed by diminishing resources and the tendency on the part of all agencies to act in isolation from each other, it is imperative that there be established a collaborative and cooperative working relationship between the offices and their related agencies in the field. This need exists not only at the State level of administration, but also more critically at the regional and local levels of program and service delivery.

Under the leadership of the Assistant Commissioners of these three offices, seven regional conferences involving local, regional and State personnel were conducted during the spring of 1979. The purpose of the conferences was to identify critical problems and issues to be addressed through a cooperative action plan under development by the three offices and to gather recommendations for the resolution of these problems and issues from professional personnel serving at all levels of program and service delivery. This report presents a summary of the major problems, issues, and recommendations which call for combined action at the State, regional and local levels.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Through this series of conferences, it has been found that local, regional and State personnel associated with special education, occupational education and vocational rehabilitation perceived the following to be central problems and issues pertaining to the development of cooperative/collaborative relationships:

1. There are currently no stated common purposes, policies or procedures to foster such relationships; eligibility requirements, labeling of individuals and the lack of familarity with services available leads to failure to serve the handicapped population; there is no clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of each office in relation to commonly served clients; failure to include field personnel and clients in policy development at upper levels leads to lack of knowledge and understanding, as well as divisive attitudes and "turfmanship."

2. There is no reliable system for managing the transmission, storage and retrieval of information required at all levels within and between the offices; information regarding laws, regulations, policies, procedures, availability of resources and services, is either not timely or inconsistent; strategies to inform and gain the support of the public-at-large are needed.

3. Attitudes of the nonhandicapped toward the disabled reflect fear, indifference and stereotyping; expectations regarding achievement are often unrealistic and many times too high or too low; these attitudes prevent timely and appropriate provision of services.

4. A shortage of appropriate personnel, programs, services, materials, equipment, transportation and facilities is compounded by conditions of rural living and increased competition for available funds; there is no formalized continuous curriculum encompassing career education, pre-vocational, occupational education and vocational rehabilitation for the handicapped population; current policies and practices tend to exclude occupational education and vocational rehabilitation personnel from the Committees on the Handicapped (COH) and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) development process.

5. There is a need for more certified or qualified personnel to work with the handicapped in areas of career education, pre-vocational and occupational education; there is also a need for qualified support personnel who can serve between agencies; pre-service and in-service training programs are currently insufficient or inadequate.

BACKGROUND

In the fall of 1978 the Assistant Commissioners of the offices for Education of Children with Handicapping Conditions, Occupational and Continuing Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation, initiated a process for the development of a system of interagency collaboration and cooperation to more effectively and efficiently deliver services to the early childhood, adolescent and adult handicapped at the State, regional and local levels of service. State Education Department staff were asked to report the needs, constraints, and issues related to collaboration and cooperation with and between the deliverers of services at all levels. The reports reflected the following needs:

1. Shared knowledge of the laws and regulations governing the objectives and service goals of each office.

2. A definition of roles and responsibilities of staff members within the respective tables of organization that relate to working with the handicapped.

3. Knowledge of the range of services and programs available from each office.

4. Centralized management of collaborative and cooperative efforts supported by appropriate communication and personnel involvements at all levels of department administration.

5. Personnel development programs for staff regarding:

    A. Process of cooperative planning
    B. Shared programmatic concerns

6. Sharing existing resources (facilities, financial, and personnel) and joint planning and proposal development in seeking new resources.

7. Changing or developing attitudes of involved staff toward commitment to commonly held goals for the handicapped client.

8. Modifying professional staffing patterns to insure increased planning and service time and decreased time required for "bureaucratic" or "clerical" functions.

9. Involvement of the clients in determining service goals and objectives.

10. Expansion of the effort of program services from those offices or departments which deal with continuing education.

These needs statements were reviewed to identify the possible topical areas around which they evolved. The review produced five (5) categories of concern: Communication/Information, Attitudes, Policies/Procedures, Resources (Human and Other), and Programs (K-Adult).

These categories then served as the basis around which the conference objective would evolve. This objective was stated as follows:

> The objective of the Regional Conferences is to identify critical problems which impede the development of interagency collaboration and cooperation in providing services to the handicapped.

Each category was then defined so that every one would be working from the same base.

A. Communication/Information: Identified needs in the sharing of knowledge and services.

B. Attitudes: Attitudinal needs for the development of commitments to the provision of appropriate services to the handicapped.

C. Policies/Procedures: Establishment of operational policies and procedures to insure interagency collaboration and cooperation for optimum services to the handicapped client.

D. Resources (Human and Other): Resource needs, including the sharing of resources, to eliminate duplication of efforts and to close needed service gaps.

E. Programs (K-Adult): Sharing in the development of appropriate educational programs which range from pre-service and in-service training of professional staff to joint individualized education program planning for handicapped individuals.

CONFERENCE DESCRIPTION

Professional personnel from State, regional and local agencies associated with special education, occupational education and vocational rehabilitation were invited to participate and contribute. Through the process of problem identification and analysis, the conference participants:

1. identified problems and issues within the defined categories
2. ranked these problems and issues according to degree of impact and potential for resolution
3. indicated those problems which required State-level action before regional or local activity could be initiated.
4. recommended courses of action to be taken for resolution of the problems which appeared to have an impact on effective service delivery to the handicapped.

At the close of each conference, Department coordinating personnel and clerical staff prepared a formal record of information developed by participants and distributed it by mail to all conference participants. Copies of these documents are currently on file in each of the three Department Offices and have been used as the basis for this summary report.

CONFERENCE LOG

Conference Number	At	Date	Host(s)	Approximate Attendance
1	Plattsburgh	March 15	- Clinton County Community College - Clinton-Essex BOCES	80
2	New York City	March 30	- Department of Vocational Education at New York University	140
3	Utica	April 5	- Utica Community College - Oneida-Madison BOCES	165
4	Long Island	April 11	- New York Institute of Technology - Nassau County BOCES	115
5	Poughkeepsie	April 12	- Dutchess County Community College - Dutchess County BOCES	150
6	Batavia	May 21	- Genesee County Community College - Genesee-Wyoming-Livingston BOCES	245
7	Binghamton	May 29	- SUNY at Binghamton - Broome County BOCES	115

PROBLEMS, ISSUES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following pages are a synopsis of the problems, issues, and recommendations under each category generated by the participants during the seven (7) regional conferences.

This information provides a statewide perspective but agencies considering local conferences should refer to the individual report for their region as it will be more specific and address regional differences.

Communication/Information

Synopsis of Problems and Issues

- There is a lack of reliable systems for the transmission, storage and retrieval of information within or between all levels of administration of the three agencies.
- There is a lack of current knowledge or understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of each office as they pertain to special education, occupational education and vocational rehabilitation of the handicapped.
- There is a need to improve the use of media for the dissemination of information to the clients, related service agencies, the business community and the public in general.
- Information that is available is not well written in commonly understandable language; such information is often conflicting or subject to misinterpretation within and between the three agencies.
- There is a need to improve data gathering and reporting requirements at local, State and Federal levels so that reporting time required is minimized.
- There is a need for a coordinating mechanism and/or liaison personnel to facilitate communication within and between the agencies.

Synopsis of Recommendations

- Establish an interagency information network with developmental responsibilities at the State level and dissemination responsibilities at the regional and local levels.
- Develop regional interagency task forces using respective advisory panels or boards to design systems for information sharing.
- Develop central information index, references and "data banks" using either manual or computer files which are regionally accessible.
- Create a central interagency coordination office with responsibilities to serve as a clearinghouse for information and ensure clarity and consistency in language common to the three agencies that is readable in the field.
- Create a central coordinating agency to develop a single guideline describing the goals, objectives, policies and procedures which are both commonly held by or unique to each of the three agencies.
- Use the public media for transmitting information to the clients and public in general; provide safeguards to ensure that information to the public is familiar to agency staff personnel.

Attitudes

Synopsis of Problems and Issues

- Attitudes of the nonhandicapped toward the disabled reflect fear of the handicapped, indifference or stereotyping; These attitudes exist within the profession, student peers and public.
- Conflicting and unrealistic expectations regarding potential for achievement.
- The attitudes listed above prevent timely and appropriate provision of planning and programming for the handicapped.
- The attitudes listed above reflect a lack of information, communication and training within the profession and community at large.
- "Turfmanship" creates a division between groups and agencies which prevents cooperation and collaboration.
- Excessive mandates seem to stimulate community resentment, fear of loss of local control, and impedes innovative programming and may be inappropriate or not useful.
- There is a need for more flexibility in the use of money at the local level; labeling for funding purposes results in "pigeon-holing" and does not provide for individual needs.

Synopsis of Recommendations

- Develop and implement extensive pre-service and in-service training programs for field staff in the three agencies.
- Establish interagency committees or councils at the regional level to:
  1. define roles, responsibilities and division of labor
  2. identify training needs
  3. disseminate information to the various professional, parent and public and private groups and agencies
- Conduct periodic regional interagency workshops for the continued identification of problem areas and development of local action plans.
- Establish programs which foster broad exposure of persons to the handicapped and to programs currently being provided.

Policies/Procedures

Synopsis of Problems and Issues

- The management of the three agencies of all levels lacks a unifying statement of common goals.
- There is a lack of standard policies and procedures governing interagency cooperation; those that exist are not understood. Such a condition leads to inflexibility, lack of role definition and failure to delineate responsibilities.
- Information is poorly disseminated with no coordination; newly developed or changing policies are not known prior to time of implementation; lead time is inadequate or lacking.
- There is a need for uniformity in criteria for client eligibility for services from the three agencies; current criteria present gray areas due to use of labels and economic status of the client. Terminology is not universal and leads to "pigeon holing."
- There is a need to consolidate information regarding legislation affecting the three agencies; legislation and regulations are contradictory and do not reflect practicality of field experience.
- Policy and procedure development at upper levels of management need to include involvement of field personnel and clients.
- There is a need to develop current personnel policies regarding pre-service and in-service training essential for those serving the handicapped.
- Current organization of the Committee on the Handicapped does not include representation of all three agencies; nor does the process for developing the Individualized Education Program.
- Guidelines regarding class size, facilities, support services and other least restrictive environment issues are not definitive and need development.
- Authority needs to be given to local levels of administration; there is a need for a system of accountability through effective monitoring and evaluation.

Synopsis of Recommendations

- Establish a centralized interagency task force to develop a set of unifying policies and procedures based upon local and regional needs assessments to be disseminated to field personnel and related agencies.
- Develop a common official set of regulatory definitions and terminologies through regional conferences; definitions should specifically clarify the learning disability classification. Regulations should be distributed to the field and dealt with through joint training, seminars and common communication networks to assure mutual understanding.

Synopsis of Recommendations (Cont'd)

- Dissemination of unified policies, procedures and regulations to the public; analyze the need for legislative changes and involve agency representatives and the public in general in meetings with legislators regarding these changes.

- Establish regional and local interagency meetings for the purpose of opening communication with field staff and consulting with them on special policy and procedural problems.

- Establish in-service training programs based on needs related to characteristics of the handicapped, Individualized Education Program development, industrial needs of the handicapped, knowledge of evaluation and assessment in the areas of special education, occupational education and vocational rehabilitation.

- Modify law and regulation regarding composition of the Committee on the Handicapped to include occupational education and vocational rehabilitation representatives; involve representatives of these agencies in development, implementation and review of the Individualized Education Program process.

- Establish a central clearinghouse for agency identification; compile a list of such agencies and distribute to the field. Local and regional units should evaluate service agencies and report to Boards of Education, Committees on the Handicapped and community.

- Local Boards of Education should establish comprehensive policies based upon Federal and State law and regulation; administrators of local agencies should meet to establish formal agreements, designate liaison personnel and conduct regional conferences for sharing information.

Resources (Human and Other)

Synopsis of Problems and Issues

- There is a lack of funds necessary to respond to new mandates and there is increasing competition for existing funds. Areas requiring additional funding include acquiring and training personnel, specialized materials, equipment, transportation and facilities.
- There is a lack of qualified teachers in the area of occupational education for the handicapped and a more general lack of support personnel in special education, occupational education and vocational rehabilitation.
- There are inadequate and insufficient in-service and pre-service training programs for personnel servicing the handicapped.
- There is a lack of knowledge and coordination of knowledge about resources and services which may be shared by the three agencies.
- Equipment, facilities and transportation are not available; that which exists requires modification to meet the needs of the handicapped.
- There are too few alternative career education and continuing education training programs; industry is not prepared to continue training of the handicapped.

Synopsis of Recommendations

- Increase the level of funding at the State and Federal levels in keeping with additional mandates, policies and procedures.
- Increase levels of staffing in the area of support services; staffing at local and regional levels should be shared between these agencies and based upon a comprehensive needs assessment.
- Develop and periodically conduct a series of in-service workshops and training programs for all interagency personnel to increase knowledge and skills of personnel in working with the handicapped and utilization of existing resources; target groups should include school boards, administrators and parents as well as support service personnel serving the three agencies.
- The Department should take a leadership role in coordinating and disseminating information regarding rules, regulations, policies and procedures related to the responsibilities of each agency; implement a broad informational program to inform and engage the public regarding sharing and utilization of resources.
- Establish county-based directories or handbooks of resources and services available, including eligibility criteria and areas where needed resources are lacking; make directories available regionally through a central clearinghouse.

Synopsis of Recommendations (Cont'd)

- Establish professional positions to provide an overview of local resources available and to direct clients to appropriate resources; establish local, regional and State committees or task forces for the purpose of interagency communication and coordination of resources, needs assessments and allocations.

Programs (K - Adult)

Synopsis of Problems and Issues

- Existing programs are inadequate; there is a need for a continuous integrated program of career education, and pre-vocational education programs for children prior to entrance into secondary occupational education programs.
- There is a need for more comprehensive and flexible occupational education programs at the secondary level that are responsive to community needs.
- There is a lack of needed work-study and continuing education and training programs for the handicapped adult, including on-the-job training programs in the employment market.
- There is a lack of certified or qualified personnel to work with the handicapped in the areas of career education, pre-vocational and occupational education; pre-service and in-service programs are currently inadequate.
- There is a lack of knowledge, information coordination and consistency in client eligibility within and between agencies; there is no clear delineation of roles, responsibilities and definition of terms needed for interagency cooperation.
- The issue of education in the least restrictive environment is compounded by lack of programs in rural areas, lack of suitable transportation, lack of adequate well-trained supportive service personnel and the lack of residential or live-in facilities near centers of appropriate educational or employment opportunities.

Synopsis of Recommendations

- Establish standard policies and guidelines which emphasize early identification, evaluations and assessment at elementary and early secondary levels; provide for interdisciplinary team evaluation procedures.
- Establish interagency teams at State and regional levels to develop a comprehensive career education, pre-vocational and occupation education curriculum K-12.
- Establish a bureau, or central/regional committees, responsible for analysis and identification of work experiences and job training programs, assessment of needs and dissemination of related information. Revise Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) enrollment policies to provide day time adult work-study programs which reflect client and community employment needs of the community.
- Develop comprehensive in-service training programs to involve local and regional personnel from each agency; programs should concentrate on increasing knowledge and skills in working with handicapped individuals.
- Use State and regional task forces to clarify and make common definitions of the target population. Local agencies should expand involvement in Individualized Education Program development to broaden scope and possibility for sharing services.
- Establish a clearinghouse of services available by local and regional agencies; encourage sharing of personnel between small school districts.

PLAN FOR FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

As a result of the information presented in this summary report, the Office for Education of Children with Handicapping Conditions, Occupational and Continuing Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation will cooperatively carry out the following activities during the next year.

1. Disseminate the summary report, "Services for the Handicapped - Linking Special Education, Occupational Education and Vocational Rehabilitation," to the regional conference participants and appropriate staff and constituents of the three Offices.

2. Develop an Interoffice Action Plan which will insure a continuum of services for the handicapped, linking special education, occupational and continuing education, and vocational rehabilitation.

3. Develop and disseminate an Interoffice Directory of Resources and Services which would list field contact points, services available, and procedures for obtaining those services.

4. Sponsor a conference for Special Education Directors, Occupational Education Directors, and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Office Managers to promote systematic communication among key field administrators.

5. Sponsor a second round of regional conferences which will have as a theme, the partnership of governmental and voluntary agencies in supporting the implementation of the continuum of services in special education, occupational and continuing education, and vocational rehabilitation. Participants would be representatives of governmental and voluntary agencies as well as the consumers of those services and parents of the handicapped.

6. Expand the personnel development programs at the preparation/preservice and inservice levels so that appropriate personnel will acquire the knowledge necessary to assist in the implementation of coordinated services to the handicapped.

7. Develop and disseminate monthly joint policy memoranda to clarify major policy issues and concerns identified through the regional workshops to appropriate constituencies of the three Offices. These policy memoranda will address issues including, but not limited to:

   a) clarification of policies on teacher certification related to special education and occupational education

   b) the relationship of occupational education and vocational rehabilitation personnel to the Committee on the Handicapped

   c) the role of occupational education and vocational rehabilitation personnel in the development and implementation of the Individualized Education Program

   d) the relationship of the Individualized Education Program and the Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP)